The Returns of Antigone and the Remains of *Antigone*: To Bury or not to Bury

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This essay represents an effort to rework old ground in some ways, turning over, unearthing, exhuming once again the remains not so much of Polyneices' corpse, which has already been unsettled, unearthed, too many times, not least at the hands of the guards who deliver Antigone to Creon. I ask not precisely about Antigone as the figure that remains outside of Hegel's system, failing to be properly incorporated, but rather about the effects of her attempts to be heard on others, how her efforts to inscribe her burial of her brother as meaningful, legitimate and intelligible underwrite the marginalization of others. At the same time, I suggest that alongside and interwoven with the oppositions generally recognized as central to *Antigone* is another structuring theme that has been rendered less recognizable, in part because the question of whether or not certain lives are considered worthy of honour has been discounted in advance, so that the question of whether or how they might be granted funerary rites does not signify as noteworthy. We know from Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet that the Theban cycle is replete with word play, reversals, and ambiguities.[1] Yet there is a particular series of resonances and reverberations, enigmatic references that resound throughout the plays that have been peculiarly absent from commentary, or rather relegated to its margins. What this paper interrogates then is a particular pattern of silencing that haunts the official, philosophical narrative that has established itself around the text of *Antigone*. I sift through the interpretive history of the play to ask what that history casts aside, what it leaves unsaid, what it fails to see, that which it figures without thematizing or conceptualizing.

1. *Antigone*'s secret encryption

One might say that encrypted within the tomb of Antigone, buried alive in the underground cave in which she lives out her last days, is a secret that she has been allowed to take with her to the grave. It is by now very well established that Sophocles' Theban cycle of plays is centrally concerned with what we see and what we don't see, with what we understand and what we fail to understand, with

1 Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, New York 1998, pp. 113–140 (the chapter "Ambiguity and Reversal: On the Enigmatic Structure of *Oedipus Rex*").

that which we know, and with that which we characteristically, constitutionally fail to know. It is, then, about the failures of wisdom, the lapses of judgment that make us who we are, the partiality and limitations of what we take to be important and what we leave aside. Sophocles is concerned with the systematic failures of vision that structure the self-understanding of Oedipus, Antigone and Creon, with how their blindness and their vision construct their ethics, with how Tiresias, the blind prophet, sees in ways that go beyond what Oedipus and Creon take to be self-evident, immediate, indisputable and obvious facts. How then has a certain blindness persisted in Sophocles' most eminent interpreters?

Myths shape philosophy, figuring philosophical imaginaries in ways that have yet to be fully excavated or exhumed. The myth of Antigone, daughter of Oedipus, has figured a certain philosophical and psychic heritage, one that has been handed down to the west through Freud's narration of the Oedipal complex, and G. W. F. Hegel's adumbration of Antigone in terms of a dichotomy that has staged an ethical heroine who pits the values of the rituals of mourning against those of the order and regulation of the state. A child of incest, Antigone sacrifices marriage, motherhood, and ultimately her life, a sacrifice that is recuperated, in Hegel's narrative, by the necessity of stabilizing a social contract that requires her subordination. Yet, encrypted in this myth of Oedipus, the anti-hero, of Creon, the hero of the modern political state, and of Antigone, whose sacrificial act, dedicated to honouring her brother's burial, has made her into a hero of sorts for feminist philosophy, lies another shadowy mythical figuring that has proved itself inaccessible. The celebration of ancient Greece, as the inaugural moment both of philosophy and of democracy (though the fact that this democracy was limited to free, adult males is not always remarked) gives rise to a philosophy that sets itself, in Hegel's narrative, on a path of progressive self-consciousness, one in which the divergent, but equally valid ethical customs of which Hegel takes Antigone and Creon to be representative, come to be formalized as principles that settle into their proper place, according to a hierarchy in which the bonds uniting the kinship of family (aligned with Antigone and femininity) must be answerable to the welfare of the state (aligned with Creon and masculinity). The shadowy figuration that hides in the crevices of this celebratory tale of the twin births of democracy and philosophy, where the *Sittlichkeit* (ethical life) of the essentially pre-legal era of ancient Athens serves as both model and precursor of the modern European state, in which a more nuanced view of individual responsibility is said to emerge, reveals the complicity of the heroes philosophy has made of the Oedipal family with colonialism and slavery, a complicity that subtends the story we philosophers and critics continue to tell ourselves, even when we offer recuperative readings of Antigone. Such is the wager of this essay.

Following Martin Heidegger's meditation on the sense in which man is the strangest of all (*to deinotaton*), the most *unheimlich*, the trope of the uncanny has

marked the reception of *Antigone*.[2] Jacques Lacan also takes up the uncanny in his discussion of Antigone, where he provides a reading of the beauty and splendour of Antigone that rehearses the tendency of the tradition to fetishize Antigone.[3] Rather than allowing the oscillation inherent in the fetishization of Antigone, which informs Lacan's reading of *Antigone*, to dictate my interpretation, where, on the one hand, she is figured by her dazzling beauty, admired in her splendour, and revered for her ethical stance, yet on the other hand she is domesticated, purified of the threat she represents to the established order when her character flouts the expectations of womanly conduct in ancient Greece, stepping out of line, I follow through the political logic of Antigone's perpetual renaissance. For Hegel too, Antigone constituted the purest heroine of all, yet at the same time, his response to her intransigence was to contain, quell, or domesticate her unruliness. At a time when feminism threatens to challenge the established order, Hegel's response is to tame Antigone's radical edge. She is allowed to represent an ethical point of view, but that ethical point of view must be strictly circumscribed within the family, purified by religious piety, and must be made to understand its subordinate role to the state. Thus Hegel applauds *Antigone* as the most sublime play, only to echo the Kantian response to the sublime, by re-establishing a relationship of mastery to the disequilibrium Antigone's intransigence causes. Hegel puts Antigone back in her place, contains her within domesticity, thereby defusing the terrifying visage of someone who appears to be so in love with death that she sacrifices everything for it, someone who will brook no opposition. It is as if, true to Jacques Derrida's reading of Antigone as a figure of abjection, where sexual difference becomes the stumbling block on which the dialectical machine of thought founders, the threat that the feminine constitutes is tamed by Hegel's substitutive manoeuvres.[4] Hegel deals with his sister, who threatens in 'real life' to become more than, other than, a sister, by disciplining Antigone, thereby sublimating, and taming his own desire.[5]

While Hegel is at pains to emphasize the reciprocity of human and divine law, the way in which the nation proceeds from the family, and the way in which the self-conscious, ethical realm of citizenship emerges out of, and remains tied to and dependent on the unconscious netherworld, it nonetheless remains the case that a differential economy of consciousness organizes this apparent reciprocity, which is

2 The argument I develop in this essay, which I explore at greater length in Tina Chanter, *Whose Antigone? The Tragic Marginalization of Slavery*, New York 2011, is as much a reworking of my own earlier readings of the figure of Antigone as it is of interpretations of others.

3 Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959–1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, vol. VII, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, London/New York 1992.

4 Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, Lincoln (Nebraska) 1986, pp. 133–134.

5 Derrida suggests that Hegel's relationship with his sister, to whom he was very close, informs his reading of Antigone.

orchestrated in advance by a decision that has already been made in favour of the authority of the state over whatever claims might be made on behalf of the right of the family to mourn the dead. In Athens/Thebes, this authority is negotiated not only in relation to sexual difference but also in relation to the differentiation of Greeks from non-Greeks, Europeans from non-Europeans, free citizen adult males from slave, barbarian non-citizens. In Hegel it is negotiated in relationship to the colonial wars of ancient Greece and modern Germany. Citizenship, therefore, is defined not only as the province of adult males, but as the product of adult, free, Greek males, and it is conferred through lines of kinship that require citizenship to be passed along through the bodies of women who are not themselves recognized as citizens, but whose Greek heritage enables their sons on becoming adults to attain citizenship.

2. Sexual difference and the occlusion of slavery

Recent interpretations of Sophocles' *Antigone* have focused their attention on kinship and sexual difference.[6] Even as such interpretations engage polemically with Hegel, they also tend to reinscribe the opposition between state and family in terms of which he reads the tragedy. I argue here that while the question of kinship is clearly central to *Antigone*, it needs to be understood not only as a site in which tensions regarding familial obligations and those associated with sexual difference are negotiated in relation to the state, but also as a site of tension in terms of which the identity of slaves, foreigners, and enemies of the state are negotiated.[7] Antigone's insistence on burying her brother Polyneices is articulated not merely on the basis of establishing him as a *philos*, a loved one, but also by distinguishing him from a *doulos*, a slave. While much scholarly attention has been devoted to Antigone's argument that her brother is irreplaceable, and therefore deserving of burial notwithstanding Creon's prohibition of his burial, in a way a husband or a son is not, Antigone's differentiation of Polyneices from a slave has suffered relative neglect. Drawing on the historical context in which Sophocles constructed the Theban cycle, including the 451/0 BCE Periclean law concerning citizenship, and on textual details that establish the importance of slavery throughout the cycle, I suggest that kinship (*genos*) be understood within this context. A rich history of appropriations of *Antigone* – including Seamus Heaney's *The Burial at Thebes*, Fémi Òsófisan's *Tègònni: an African Antigone*, and Athol Fugard, John Kani and

6 Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death*, New York 2000; Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Ithaca (New York) 1985.

7 I develop the following argument in more detail in Tina Chanter, "Exhuming the Remains of Antigone's Tragedy: The Encryption of Slavery", in: Alistair Welchman (Ed.), *Politics of Religion/Religions of Politics*, Dordrecht/Heidelberg/New York/London 2015, pp. 143–170.

Winston Ntshona's *The Island* – has taken up the legacy of *Antigone* in ways that connect with, and illuminate this wider interpretation of kinship.[8] When a corpse becomes the ward of the state, the family is denied the right to mourn one of its own, a denial that can be seen as symptomatic of what Orlando Patterson has called the social death an individual suffered in life, through being regarded as a terrorist or slave.[9]

Across the ages, and throughout the continents, the logic of Antigone's multiple dramatic rebirths allows a confrontation with the way in which readings of *Antigone* that draw on the logic of the excluded other, to the exclusion of thinking citizenship against the context of slavery, repeat the occlusion of slavery that Hegel's discussion of *Antigone* effects. To the extent that this logic remains confined by a Greek/European philosophical/political point of view that privileges both a subject of rationality and the pre-rational inscribed or encrypted within it, it proceeds in such a way as to defensively screen or shield an even greater threat of disequilibrium than that posed by woman as the "everlasting irony of the community".[10] The extraordinarily rich theatrical rebirth of Antigone in different political circumstances, across continents, helps illuminate the dearth of western philosophical reflection on the significance of the threat of the colonial other, which the institutions of slavery and colonialism set out to tame. The international, post-colonial, literary, theatrical, dramatic tradition that infuses new life into the figure of Antigone every time she enters the stage, each time she is put to death and reborn, as she rises again with every new production, at the same sheds light on slavery as the repressed other of the tale that western philosophy tells itself about the tragedy of *Antigone*. The significance of this tragic marginalization of slavery is reflected in the fact that again and again playwrights have turned to *Antigone* in racially combustible situations, not the least of which is Fémi Òsófisan's profound meditation on the figure of Antigone, who, having travelled the roads of history, confronts so many dangers that she has to be accompanied by bodyguards. After all, her dramatic performance always closes with her death offstage, shrouded in mystery.

What are we to make of the fact that so much scholarship has been devoted to the authenticity and meaning of the issue of irreplaceability – Antigone's claim that she would not have violated the law to bury a husband or a son, only for her brother Polyneices, who cannot be replaced – but so little attention has been paid

8 Seamus Heaney, *The Burial at Thebes: A version of Sophocles'* Antigone, New York 2004; Fémi Òsófisan, *Tègònni: an African Antigone*, Abuja 1999; *The Island*, in: Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona, *Statements*, Oxford 1974.

9 Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, Harvard 1982.

10 G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. A. V. Miller, Oxford 1979, p. 288; G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. J. Hoffmeister, Hamburg 1952, p. 340.

to another differentiation Antigone makes, when she distinguishes Polyneices from a slave? The context in which Hegel, Derrida, Lacan, and others have treated the question of Polyneices' irreplaceability is that of familial blood relation and sexual difference, and the definition of ethics that distinguishes the familial, and specifically feminine, duty of burial, from the ethics that characterizes the masculine community, citizenship, and the nation. The context in which this paper addresses the issue of irreplaceability is in terms of the claim that slavery and sexual difference are intrinsically connected with one another. If familial sexual difference constitutes the remains, the residue, of Hegel's dialectical thought, that which cannot be fully digested by metaphysics, slavery constitutes the still more resistant, even more radically excluded, element of the thought that thinks these remains.

The word *doulos* is not even translated as 'slave' in many translations of *Antigone*, as if there had been a deliberate writing out of the issue of slavery, by the tradition. This is in keeping with Hegel's argument in the *Aesthetics* to the effect that slavery was not a suitable topic for tragedy, an argument that both detracts from the extent to which slavery was in fact broached by the tragic poets, and functions to dissuade future exploration of slavery, both as an extant theme in ancient tragedy, and as a dramatic theme for dramatists appropriating tragedy in new contexts.[11] Perhaps, contrary to received wisdom, tragedy is not dead after all; perhaps those dramatists who appropriate the tragedy of *Antigone* in ways that expose the abuses of colonialism and slavery can help shed light on Sophocles' *Antigone*, by bringing to light aspects of tragedy present in its original incarnation, but covered over by an interpretative tradition.

British colonization, and the spectre of slavery, provide the backdrop against which *Tègònni: An African Antigone*, by the Nigerian playwright Òsófisan, unfolds. Antigone arrives on the scene late, having survived the hazardous roads of history. Òsófisan is thinking through both the way in which Antigone has become an inspirational figure for so many, having made so many appearances in diverse political contexts throughout history, a figure who fights for freedom, justice and truth in the face of corrupt regimes, whether Nazism or apartheid, the Dirty War of Argentina, or the collusion of corrupt officials with European multinational oil corporations in postcolonial Nigeria. Not only is Òsófisan thinking through Antigone's legacy as inspirational for freedom fighters; he is also thinking through Antigone's implication in a European, colonial history – a European colonial history and consciousness that, it turns out, has inflected the philosophical

11 G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. 1, ed. T. M. Knox, Oxford 1988, pp. 208–211; G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, vol. 2, Frankfurt am Main 1970, pp. 272–275.

and psychoanalytic reception of *Antigone*, not least as it has been handed down to us from Hegel.[12] This implication includes thinkers such as Derrida, Lacan and Butler, whose responses to the play, although in crucial respects taking their distance from Hegel, are still oriented to the very categories that Hegel's reading of the play privileges, when he aligns Creon with the state and Antigone with family/kinship. Even as, in her important work, *Antigone's Claim*, Butler complicates how these categories should be understood, arguing that they are inextricably implicated in one another, she still retains them as central categories, and in this sense reinscribes them.

3. Expanding the parameters of kinship to include slavery

While kinship, configured in relation to the familial, is certainly central to *Antigone*, it also bears upon the question of who is a slave, and who is free. Once the importance of such questions is established, it also becomes clear that the parameters within which issues of kinship are usually treated with regard to the play need to be expanded. Like the term *Geschlecht* (as Derrida has pointed out), among the connotations of the word *genos* is not only kinship but also race.[13] The generational confusion into which Oedipus has thrown his offspring, by committing incest with his mother, Jocasta, ramifies beyond his immediate kin. Referring to the 450/1 BCE law that Pericles established, requiring that in order to qualify as Athenian, both one's father and mother must be Athenian, Jean-Pierre Vernant observes that Pericles' law "officially prohibited marriage between Athenians and foreigners" and thereby formalized "a marked tendency toward family endogamy"

12 In his *Aesthetics*, Hegel engages in a somewhat tortuous explanation as to why slavery is an inappropriate topic for tragedy. His argument is intriguing on several different levels, as an attempt to negotiate between a Platonic and Aristotelian response to tragic poetry, as an interpretation of Greek tragic heroes, as a reflection on the role of tragedy as a commentary on the transition from *Sittlichkeit* and *Moralität* in a society that is transforming from a pre-legal to a law based one, and as a defensive reaction to thinking through the significance of new world slavery and colonialism. Tragic heroes are interpretations of the statues of gods. Their ethical rigidity and inflexibility are reflections of Greek statuary. Hegel's account, which aligns Antigone with the old order of divinities, and Creon with the new, also manages to infuse Antigone with racialized traits that construe her as on the brink of civilization. Hegel's attitude towards the ethos of the Greeks is ambivalent. Laudable in bearing unwavering responsibility even for events over which they had no control (e. g. Oedipus accepting responsibility for his unwitting marriage of his mother and murder of his father), yet unsophisticated in their failure to distinguish voluntary from involuntary acts, Greek tragic heroes stand, for Hegel, as both political and moral precursors to nineteenth-century Europe, and as that which modern Europe, allegedly, surpasses in moral sophistication.

13 Jacques Derrida, "Geschlecht II: Heidegger's Hand", in: John Sallis (Ed.), *Deconstruction and Philosophy: The Texts of Philosophy*, Chicago 1987, p. 162.

and away from exogamy that had been extant for some time in Athens.[14] Following Sheila Murnaghan, William Blake Tyrrell and Larry Bennett link the Periclean law, which echoes the Thucydidean funeral oration, to Antigone's argument about the replaceability of a husband or son: "From the viewpoint of marriage as an institution, one husband is as good as another. This is the rationale behind Pericles' law on citizenship of 451 B.C.: the *dêmos* cares nothing for the emotional bonds in marriage but only that the man and the woman be Athenians".[15] Murnaghan points out that in characterizing a husband in terms of the "abstract role that could be played by several different men", Antigone is actually echoing the terms that Creon had employed earlier, when he invokes the image that there are other fields to plough.[16] The same logic of substitution informs the hoplite formation, in which if one warrior fell, another would step up to the line of defence created by the soldiers' shields to take his place;[17] Hegel's reference to the need for loyal soldiers to defend the polis fits in seamlessly with such a logic. It is also within this context that Hegel's understanding of the irreplaceability of the brother for the sister would have to be revisited.[18] Murnaghan contrasts the affection with which Antigone reveres her brother with the interchangeability of husbands that Pericles' law implies.[19]

It emerges, then, that Sophocles writes the Oedipal cycle in a context where marriage practices in Athens have become increasingly endogamous, where Pericles' law formulates marriage – or rather (since some critics dispute that the law concerned marriage as such) the requirements for citizenship – in such a way as to abstract from any emotional bond, and to emphasize the substitutability of husbands, as long as they are Athenian. This interchangeability is echoed by the way in which men were viewed as warriors who were expected to defend the polis, an interchangeability that extended to burial practices.[20] Antigone's reference to the irreplaceability of her brother is neither symptomatic of her callous extremity, nor of her failure to consistently uphold the very values of *philia* with

14 Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, New York 1990, p. 67. Others have pointed out that the law did not so much concern marriage as such, but only stipulated that one's parents on both sides should be Athenian in order for the claim of an Athenian to be considered legitimate.

15 William Blake Tyrrell and Larry Bennett, *Recapturing Sophocles' Antigone*, Lanham (Maryland) 1998, p. 114.

16 Sheila Murnaghan, "*Antigone* and the Institution of Marriage", in: *The American Journal of Philology* 107 (1986), pp. 198–206.

17 William Blake Tyrrell and Larry Bennett, op. cit., 1998, p. 115.

18 G.W.F. Hegel, op. cit., 1979, p. 275; G.W.F. Hegel, op. cit., 1952, p. 327.

19 See Alan L. Boegehold, "Perikles' Citizenship Law of 450/1 BC", in: Alan L. Boegehold and Adele C. Scafuro (Edd.), *Athenian Identity and Civic Ideology*, Baltimore 1994, pp. 57–66. Boegehold dismisses the effort to link the law to racial purity.

20 William Blake Tyrrell and Larry Bennett, op. cit., 1998, p. 115.

which she aligns herself (as it is sometimes interpreted), but is rather a refusal to apply to her brother Polyneices the very logic that Creon displays in his crude (but not uncommon) image that his son can find another furrow (wife) to plough, an image that conjures up myths of autochthony at the same time as it reduces women to mere reproductive vessels, good for little else than conferring legitimate citizenship on sons, conduits of citizenship, the privileges of which are exclusive of women themselves.[21] As critics such as Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz have pointed out, "although Athenian women had no political rights they were essential for passing on citizenship to their sons".[22]

Yet none of the critics from which this picture emerges – neither Vernant, nor Murnaghan, neither Bennett and Tyrell, nor Rabinowitz, have picked up on the salience of the Periclean law, which impinged not only on Pericles, but also on Sophocles' family – and the implicit reference Sophocles makes to it in *Antigone* – for slavery. It is not just the interchangeability of bodies to which Antigone objects, nor the violation of the right typically granted to kin to honour their dead that Heaney taps into (although it is this too); Antigone also answers to an imperative to reserve the rights of burial for her brother, whom she distinguishes from a slave; in doing so she is asserting at the same time that she herself is no slave.[23] The stakes for Antigone in such a distinction are high; she is concerned not merely to honour her brother, but also to distinguish herself from the slavishness Creon imputes both to Polyneices and to Antigone herself, and even to Haemon, in as much as Haemon remains loyal to her.

There was considerable slippage in the Greek imaginary between the status of slaves and that of women, such that the alleged slavishness of barbarians was established in part by their imputed effeminacy; women's ostensible inferiority was thus used as a ground upon which to establish the ostensible inferiority of slaves to free men. Thus, the very fact that Antigone insists on enunciating a principle – indeed the very fact that Sophocles' Antigone has her voice heard at all – even if her character would have been played by a male actor – offers a challenge to the popular relegation of women to a locus that has no purchase on politics, and no relevance for the public arena. Yet in establishing her own right to enunciate as a principle the divine, familial dictate that requires the proper burial of her brother, Antigone denies that any such principle should be extended to slaves, thereby making her claim only at the expense of affirming the inferiority of slaves, and

21 Nicole Loraux, *Born of the Earth: Myth and Politics in Athens*, Ithaca (New York) 2000.

22 Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, *Anxiety Veiled: Euripides and the Traffic in Women*, Ithaca (New York) 1993, p. 3.

23 See Paul Cartledge, *The Greeks: A Portrait of Self and Others*, Oxford 2002. See also Roger Just, *Women in Athenian Law and Life*, London/New York 1989.

inscribing Polyneices within the community of human law, understood as a human community that excludes slaves from its humanity.

When Plutarch reports on Pericles' law, he does so in the context of relating how, having established the law, Pericles, on the death of his "only remaining legitimate son", pleaded for its suspension in his own case – a plea to which the Athenians acceded. Plutarch explains that Pericles "asked this so that the name and lineage of his house should not die out for want of an heir".[24] Plutarch also relates that when the law was introduced there followed "a long succession of lawsuits […] brought against those whose birth was illegitimate according to Pericles' law", lawsuits occasioned by a gift of grain from the king of Egypt "to be distributed among the citizens". A direct result of the law was, Plutarch continues, that "nearly five thousand people were convicted and sold into slavery".[25] Pericles' law, which, according to Aristotle, was instituted because there were "too many Athenians" – a rather "elliptica[l]" explanation, as Alan Boegehold notes – thus turns out to have had severe repercussions for many Athenians, whose claim to be Athenian had gone previously uncontested; so severe, that they became slaves.[26]

Glossing Creon's argument to Haemon in *Antigone* that "[t]he fields of others are fit for the plow",[27] Tyrrell and Bennett say "the parties in marriage are replaceable, and its ties, unlike those of blood kinship, *can be made and unmade* [my emphasis, TC]".[28] Taking up the sense in which even kinship ties can be made and unmade, Mary Beth Mader thinks through the familial confusion into which Oedipus' incest had thrown his generational line.[29] She does so by addressing Goethe's hope that one day the famous irreplaceability passage would be proven spurious.[30] Contra Goethe, Mader argues that Antigone's insistence on burying Polyneices was an attempt to make him a brother *and only a brother*, thereby disambiguating him from the other familial roles which his father's incest had coalesced. Asking after the implications of Mader's argument – which has the not inconsiderable merit of taking Antigone at her word, rather than wishing the argument could be proved spurious – not only for the legitimacy of symbolic, familial roles, but also for the lines of descent that qualify a king as king, that qualify, in this instance, Creon as king on the death of Polyneices and Eteocles – I expand the orbit of

24 Plutarch, *The Rise and Fall of Athens: Nine Greek Lives*, ed. Ian Scott-Kilvert, Harmondsworth 1960, p. 203.
25 Id., pp. 203–4.
26 Alan L. Boegehold, op. cit., 1994, p. 57.
27 Sophocles, *Antigone*, ed. Andrew Brown, Warminster 1987, l. 569, quoted in: William Blake Tyrrell and Larry Bennett, op. cit., 1998, p. 114.
28 William Blake Tyrrell and Larry Bennett, op. cit., 1998, p. 114.
29 Mary Beth Mader, "Antigone's Line", in: *Bulletin de la société Américaine de philosophie de langue Française* 14, 2 (2005), pp. 1–32.
30 Quoted in William Blake Tyrrell and Larry Bennett, op. cit., 1998, pp. 112–3.

Mader's interrogation to include heredity as it affects the political realm. As Butler points out, Antigone insists not only on burying Polyneices, but in publicizing her act of defiance, and in doing so she defies the expectation that women play no part in politics. At the same time (and this is not an aspect that Butler emphasizes), she challenges Creon's sovereignty. In effect, she proves herself more adept at understanding the relation of interdependency of *polis* and *oikos* than Creon (and in doing so, shows herself to be more of a Hegelian than Hegel can bring himself to admit!). In this sense, she proves herself to be a more worthy inheritor of the throne than Creon, except, of course, her character is created in a culture that would not have countenanced a woman's political leadership, in a culture where women were not deemed worthy of citizenship, let alone government. Yet Antigone's justification of her burial of Polyneices, her appeal to the sanctity of the bonds of *philia*, bonds that also prove to be decisive for determining the sovereign authority of Thebes, takes shape and is heard only at the price of corroborating the inferior status of slaves. A slave would not deserve the honour of burial, nor would a slave elicit Antigone's violation of Creon's law, but Antigone's brother, Polyneices, does.

Antigone disambiguates Polyneices not only from a potential son or husband, but also from a slave, a disambiguation which echoes a thematic concern that, once one begins to look for it, shows up throughout the Oedipus cycle. Sophocles' concern with *genos* is not restricted to a narrow understanding of kinship, but extends to the differentiation of citizens from non-citizens, freemen from slaves, and Greeks from barbarians. The very clarity that Antigone seeks in ensuring that her brother is recognized as her brother, precisely her anxiety in preserving or reinstating the difference between brother and uncle, is also a way of distinguishing between her family lineage and the deracination of slaves, what Orlando Patterson describes as "social death",[31] a fate that Oedipus himself narrowly avoided.

In exposing Oedipus, in order to avert an oracle, Laius and Jocasta transgress Theban law. Had Oedipus been given to magistrates, to be sold into slavery – which would have followed a pattern that was not uncommon – there would have been no such transgression. When Oedipus avoids the fate of abandonment as an infant on Mount Cithaeron, saved from exposure by a shepherd, his feet are bound together. The bodily integrity usually reserved for freemen, for citizens, and which the Greeks held dear – although beating and torture of slaves was commonplace – is thereby violated, a violation that Oedipus mimics when he casts out his own eyes. The boundary separating freemen and slaves is also invoked when Oedipus expresses his fear that the mystery surrounding his origins might conceal his lowly birth. Even the Sphinx's riddle concerning the number of feet man has can be

31 Orlando Patterson, op.cit., 1982.

seen to corroborate the central theme of slavery in relation to Oedipus's identity (and thus its pertinence for the identity of his children). When we contextualize the term *andropodon*, a term that "unambiguously" designated slaves, which was formed "by analogy with" *tetrapoda* (four-footed things), a term used commonly for cattle, and as such, according to Cartledge, clearly imputing sub-humanity to slaves, the riddle of the Sphinx, which goes unanswered, is put in a new light.[32]

Antigone's insistence upon burying her brother takes shape as the effort to preserve his humanity, a humanity that is won, however, at the price of reinscribing the distinctly questionable humanity accorded by freemen to slaves. Her insistence is informed by the cultural representation of barbarians – Cartledge and Edith Hall, among others, have commented on the elision between barbarians and slaves in Greek thought – as exposing their dead on funeral pyres, where the corpses were to be stripped by carrion birds.[33] While the evidence points to this representation serving the mythical imaginary perpetuated by Greeks in order to other barbarians – to subject them to a process of othering – rather than reflecting a consistent practice, the fact remains that nonetheless, in the popular Greek imaginary, the Zoroastrian exposure of corpses is played out, and informs Antigone's anxiety that Polyneices receives a proper – read Greek, non-barbarian (non-Persian), free – burial.

4. Concluding reflections

Consider the picture that can be built up from this accumulation of details: the ease with which Oedipus might have been a slave, his concern that the spectre of slavery does indeed haunt the circumstances of his birth, his bodily impairment, Antigone's anxiety that Polyneices not be treated like a slave in death, her consequent insistence on distinguishing him from a slave in order to honour him, the pervasive, if mythically hyperbolic representation of barbarian practices of exposing corpses against which the tragedy of Antigone unfolds, and the reminder of how precarious freedom was when so many Athenians found themselves sold into slavery as a result of Pericles' law – a law that he successfully argued should be suspended in his own case, a law that is also said to have affected Sophocles' own family. Consider also the exchanges in the play, including the insult that Creon

32 Paul Cartledge, op. cit., 2002, p. 151. See also Frederick Ahl, *Two Faces of Oedipus: Sophocles'* Oedipus Tyrannus *and Seneca's* Oedipus, Ithaca (New York) 2008. Consider this in the context of arguments circulating concerning slaves as ensouled property, property barely distinguished from four footed animals, a status that renders the humanity of slaves distinctly questionable (see also Paul Cartledge, op. cit., 2002, pp. 136 and 151).

33 Paul Cartledge, op. cit., 2002; Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy*, Oxford 1989.

directs at Haemon, whom he calls a woman's slave, and the significance of the Sphinx's riddle in relation to the differentiation of animals from humans with regard to slavery. Given this accumulation, the suggestion that the parameters within which the Oedipus cycle has been interpreted need revisiting, begins to look more than plausible. It begins to look as if those shadowy others, marginalized by the reception of *Antigone*, the slaves to whom Sophocles, is, after all, indebted for the leisure time to create the play, inhabit it in ways that have not been fully recognized. To acknowledge their shadowy presence is to begin to articulate not only the ways in which the presence of slavery haunts the tragic drama of ancient Greece, but also the ways in which new world slavery and colonialism continue to haunt modern and contemporary western interpretations of *Antigone*, interpretations to which the system of chattel slavery that helped to make the Athens we celebrate what it was, remains insignificant, and for which the slaves that facilitated the leisure of free men to create tragic dramas remain invisible.